# Practices for the Twenty-first Century

**By Thich Nhat Hanh**



Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July 1996. We are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we speak English.

In my mind, the twenty-first century is like a hill, a beautiful hill with so many beautiful trees and paths and flowers and children. There will be only four more years before we start climbing the hill of the twenty-first century. You know a century is a period of one hundred years. I count on climbing it with you all. We should plan our climbing in such a way that joy, happiness is possible. We are now in the year 1996. If you have ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and then two thousand, only four kilometers. And we only have four years left to prepare ourselves for the next century.

The twenty-first century is somehow like a beautiful garden. We expect to have flowers, fruit, beautiful trees, beautiful streams of rivers -- a beautiful garden where every living being has a chance to live, has a right to be. Not only the human person, but also the squirrel, also the snail, also the snake, will have their place in that garden of the twenty-first century. We shall have the coconut trees there; we shall have the kiwi tree, mango and so on. We will have all kind of animals. In order to have such a beautiful garden, a beautiful hill to climb and to be in, we have to prepare ourselves. If you don't feel ready yet, then you have to come together to discuss the strategy, how to begin the twenty-first century with confidence.

You know, the organic gardeners are very wise. They know to preserve the garbage, and they can transform the garbage back into compost. With that kind of compost, they can grow beautiful flowers, beautiful vegetables and trees. In the kitchen of the Buddha, we learn that the garbage may be useful. If you do not know how to take care of the garbage, then there will be a mess. You cannot live. But if you know how to take care of the garbage, then the garbage will become something very useful for us, to make our garden more beautiful, to make our hill more beautiful.

During the Twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, too much. The suffering of the war in Vietnam, is a lot of garbage. The garbage is still there, not only in Vietnam, but in America. The garbage produced by the Vietnam War is still delivered all over America as a nation. The suffering is still there, not only in the veterans, in their families, but in the deep consciousness of all Americans. And not only Vietnamese and Americans suffer because of that garbage produced by the Vietnam War, but all of us in Europe, in Australia, in Africa. All of us suffered because of the garbage produced during so many, many years.

We have produced a lot of garbage everywhere. In the former Yugoslavia the garbage is still intact. No one has taken care to transform the garbage. In the Middle East, the Gulf War also produced a lot of garbage. It produced a lot of garbage in the world and it also produced a lot of garbage in our heart, in our consciousness. To take good care of the garbage is to collect them and to put them together in a heap. Maybe you have to dig a hole, you dump the garbage in, you produce some heat, you water the garbage. The organic gardeners, especially, they know how to

take care of the garbage and transform it into compost. So our suffering, the suffering we have caused, is all garbage. We should know how to good care of it order to transform them.

Who are the specialists? They are developed countries who are thinking of transporting garbage and dumping it on the Third World countries. That's not very responsible. We have only four years, before we start climbing the twenty-first century. We have to learn how to take care of our garbage now, so that at beginning of the new century we have enough compost to nourish our flower.

Today I want to talk to the children about the home they will live in in the twenty-first century. I have some vision about what we call the home of the twenty-first century. How can we organize our home in the twenty-first century so that we may live better? Architects have been working on it a lot, the habitat of the twenty-first century. We want to bring our contribution. I think the home of the twenty-first century should have a room called the breathing room, a room where we can seek asylum from aggression, from noise, from rough speech, from anger, from afflictions. Every home has to be equipped with such a room. It is equivalent to our meditation hall here at Plum Village. It is a sacred place. It does not need to be big, but it should be a real place for peace. It may be three meters by three meters, or even smaller, but it should be a real place of peace.

Every time you want to enter this room you have to bow, because this is the territory of the Buddha, the territory of peace, of compassion. Facing peace and compassion we have to be very respectful. So before entering this room you should breathe in and out and you bow to the knob of the door, because the moment you touch the knob of the door you touch the Buddha, you touch God, you touch Jesus, you touch the kingdom of heaven. Our modern home should house the kingdom of heaven inside, should house the Pure Land inside. Please children, think, meditate on this and tell us your ideas, our home of the twenty-first century.

Every time mommy is angry, every time papa is shouting at mommy, at your brother or your sister, you feel hell in your house. You don't want to dwell in hell. You want to escape. Where can you go? The answer is the pure land, the kingdom of peace that is in your home. Go to that room, bow deeply to the door, breathe in and out, softly touch the knob of the door, turn it slowly, open it and step into it with mindfulness. There is only one way of stepping into the kingdom of peace and that is walking meditation, and you have learned that in Plum Village. Breathing in, I calm myself and I make a step, breathing out I smile and then I can step into the kingdom of peace. My daddy has no right to pursue me into that territory of peace and shout after me. Because once you are in that territory of peace, you have something like diplomatic immunity. No one can pursue you into the territory of the country of peace, of the Buddha.

I think the children will profit a lot from this room. How should we call this room? "Breathing room" is okay, but I guess that there are many much more beautiful names that you can use to name this room that is in our house. Every civilized family should have such a room, because in each house there are rooms for everything: a place for eating, a place for watching television, a place for guest, a place to do laundry. We have all kind of rooms, except the kind of room we need the most, a room where we can restore our peace, we can restore our dignity. A room where we can touch the Buddha, we can touch our ancestors, we can touch our peace and our happiness.

We should tell our architects, we should tell our artists, to design that room in such a way that when we enter into that room we feel peace at once. A little bit like every time we step into the meditation hall we feel something sacred. You are not supposed to talk loudly in the meditation hall, you are not suppose to run in the meditation hall, because this is a place where people can go back to themselves, and touch the depth of themselves. That is why I always ask the children after the Dharma talk to go out of the meditation hall in the style of walking meditation.

So we should house the kingdom of peace in our modern home. What about furniture in that room? You have to think about this and tell us. What do you think is needed? I think it would need a few cushions. I think it would need a little table, so that you can place on it a beautiful flower vase; because a flower or a beautiful branch can very much represent the beauty of the cosmos. You might like to spend one hour just to arrange a flower vase that has only one flower, a few leaves. During the time you arrange the flower vase, you practice peace, and you touch peace deeply within your self. So in this beautiful room you have a few cushions, you have a little table where you can put a beautiful flower. When you go in, you may bow to the flower. The flower is fresh, and you want to be fresh as the flower. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh." You know all of us were originally flowers. Look at the children. They look exactly like flowers, very fresh, very refreshing, and that is why I love to be surrounded by children. They make you feel young and fresh.

[Bell]

The children might be angry at times, the children might be jealous at times, but they can always return to being a flower very easily. That is a miracle. But we adults, it's not that easy. We cannot return, go back to our state of being fresh very quickly. All adults have been children. Our original happiness, not original sin, is being a child. But because we have not been able to take good care of our flower, our flower is not very fresh when we grow up. So to practice meditation is to protect our flower-ness, not to let ourselves wither because of what is happening in our daily life. Look at the children, their eyes are really flowers, their mouths are flowers, their little hands are two beautiful flowers, their little teeth are flowers, very beautiful, very fresh. Every time you go into the meditation hall, you look at the flower, you bow to it, and you recover your flower-ness. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower": that is not wishful thinking, because you were originally a flower. It is possible for you to return to the state of a flower.

Maybe because you have cried a lot, that is why your eyes are not as limpid and as fresh as the eyes of children. But if you practice for few months, touching the refreshing elements within you and around you, you will recover the flower-ness of your eyes. When we look at you through your eyes, we can touch the flower-ness in you. Your smile is also a flower. If you have lost your smile, don't be discouraged. The dandelion is still keeping it for you. If you know how to look at the dandelion and you breath and you smile the flower will hand it back to you, your flower. It's not difficult. The full moon, the blue sky, everything in the cosmos is still keeping your smile for you. They are very kind. You need only to touch them and you ask for your smile back. We need you to smile.

What else do we need as furniture in the breathing room, meditation room? I think we need something to burn, incense. I prefer a very light kind of incense, not too strong. You don't have to burn a lot of incense. There are people who go to the temple and burn a whole bunch of incense, it can be very suffocating. Just one stick of incense, the kind of incense made of natural ingredients, sandalwood, something like that. We don't need anything else. Maybe we need a bell, even a mini bell. Every summer I used to teach the children how to invite the bell. I think each family should have a bell, even a small one. Everyone in the house should be able to practice inviting the bell to sound, because the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us to our true home, to smile and to touch the peace and the flower-ness in us. Please, all Dharma teachers and all the brothers and sisters, teach your children how to invite the bell.

You'll get much better just after breathing in and breathing out with the sound of the bell. When you invite the bell to sound you listen to it like you would listen to the person you love the most. And you practice breathing deeply, calming yourself and smiling. I'm certain that after three in-breaths and out-breaths like that you'll feel much better. Every time you get angry, you know, according to the practice you should not say anything. You should not do anything, everything you say, everything you do when you are angry may cause damage. The best way is to think of the room of peace and you start turning toward the direction of the room of peace and you practice walking meditation slowly to that room. Your mother looks at you and she knows what you are doing. You are practicing to take good care of your anger. She admires you for doing so. You are still young, but you know how to handle your anger.

In school they might teach you everything except how to take care of your anger. When you go to a retreat you have to learn these kinds of things. You make it into a habit every time you get angry, even with yourself. Then you have to turn to the direction of the peace room, the breathing room, and you go slowly in that direction in the style of walking meditation: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile to myself." That is very kind of you to smile to yourself, because you are suffering. When you suffer you need love, and you are the one who can offer love to yourself first. Don't wait for another person. When you arrive at the door of the breathing room, you bow, because, that is the kingdom of peace. You go into your own heart. It is a room, but it is also a domain of your heart. Turn it slowly, open it, go into it with walking meditation. When you see your cushion, you bow to it and you sit down.

After you sit down, you may like to light a stick of incense, but if you are not in the mood to light incense, then you may bow to the little bell, pick up the little bell and hold it on your hand like this. You look at it. This is a baby Buddha, a baby Bodhisattva that could help me to go back to myself. And you breath in and out three times. If you remember the gatha, that's wonderful. But if you don't remember the gatha, it's okay with just breathing in and breathing out: "Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness, I send my heart along with the sound of this bell, may the hearers awaken from forgetfulness, and transcend the heart of anxiety and sorrow."

You have to practice in your own language. You've got to have an Italian translation if you are an Italian boy or girl. If you are Dutch, then you should have a gatha in Dutch. It's nice to practice. You can even put it into music. And you can meditate in music. Why not? In Vietnamese we chant it in music. When we finish chanting it, either in silence or with the words, we feel much better already.

Now we touch the bell with the inviter. We don't call it a stick. Bell inviter. We say "invite the bell to sound." We don't say "hit the bell." We want to be kind. This is the act of waking up the bell. You do not want to do violence to the bell. You announce to the bell that you are going to invite it strongly, so that everyone can hear--this is waking the bell up. The waking up sound is made by touching the bell inviter to the bell. But instead of removing it you just keep it there, so that the sound is only a half sound. Everyone in the community and everyone in the house knows that a really loud sound will be heard, so there is no surprise. Everyone has the chance to prepare himself or herself for the call of the Buddha. The Buddha is going to call you. So you already practice breathing in, while waiting for the real sound, and then the real sound comes.

[Bell]

That is the voice of the Buddha inside you calling you back to your true home, the home of peace, the home of tolerance, the home of love. When you hear the sound, you practice breathing in and out according to another gatha. Of course you know by heart: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile." But the other gatha is "Listen, listen; this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." You say "Listen, listen;" it means I listen, I listen, that’s when you breathe in, and when you breathe out, you smile and you say "this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." This is the voice of the Buddha inside. If you do that three times, you feel much better. Peace has become something real. You don't suffer like a few minutes before. And you know something? Your mommy hears it. She is not in the room but she hears it. She is very proud of her child who tries hard to take care of his or her anger. The next time when she gets angry, I'm sure that she will do like you. Instead of shouting, she will go to the breathing room, she will practice like you.

Only one person practices, but the practice benefit all the other people. Your daddy may be angry, but at the sound of the bell he may be released from his anger. All his children are practicing peace, practicing taking good care of their anger. So when the atmosphere of the family has become difficult for you to breathe, you should not stay there and bear. Because when mommy and daddy get angry with each other there is something like a storm hanging in the air and that is not healthy for the children, because the heavy atmosphere penetrates into the child. It's not healthy for the child and the child has no escape.

In the old times our home was surrounded by a big garden, and every time the child happened to be in an atmosphere of tension, he could always run out and play with the lake, the pond, the dragonfly, the butterfly, or he might go to an uncle, or an aunt, or a cousin. But now we live in a very small apartment house, no uncle, no aunt, no cousin, no lotus pond, no coconut tree, nothing, only cars below, a lot of noise, a lot of dust. The child has no escape. Sometimes the child takes refuge in the bathroom. She suffers so much, she locks the bathroom from inside and her parents do not know that their child suffers so terribly in the bathroom. But you are not safe, entirely safe, in the bathroom because the sound and the atmosphere of tension breaks through the door and comes in. It continues to afflict you. So it is very hard for children in our days. Therefore the breathing room, the room of peace, is a solution for the twenty-first century. Please, you who are architects, who sit there, listen to us. Design us a home where we have a territory of peace, where we can have an island of peace in the midst of the ocean of turbulence. Design us the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land in our modern home, please. You who are artists, help us to decorate that room, to arrange that room so that we will have a chance, we will have an escape.

While you are practicing breathing, and touching peace, and restoring peace, your mother may be interested in doing the same. My child is practicing alone. I should go there and support him. Very kind of her. So instead of cutting carrots, she says, "Well, I can cut my carrot later on. I should join my child now." So she puts down the knife, she goes slowly in the direction of the peace room and she practices walking meditation, and suddenly you hear the sound of the door. You guess that your mommy is coming to join you. And you feel happy. It is very nice to be practicing with a Dharma sister who is your mother. Then you feel that she has come and she sits down just behind you and she practices breathing in and out. Now you feel supported. I think that this is one of the most beautiful things you can see in life, mother and son or daughter sitting quietly in the lotus position and practicing breathing in and out to restore peace. If you are a painter, please draw us that painting. If you are a musician, then write a piece of music on that.

And daddy, what is he thinking, sitting alone outside? I think his love for you and for your mommy is always there. Sometimes it is covered up by some irritation, but the love is still there intact. Your practice of breathing and taking good care of your irritation, anger, will move him. It would be no surprise if he will join you later on. Happiness is something possible. You don't have to go to the supermarket and buy anything at all. Suddenly happiness comes down to your family. That is one idea concerning our home for the twenty-first century. And the children please have a Dharma discussion today. Find out what you like about the breathing room, the peace room in the house -- the embassy of the Buddha in your own home.

Another idea concerning the home of the twenty-first century is a garden where there is a path for walking meditation. Because walking meditation can release a lot of tension, can help you to touch the beauty of life, of nature. That garden may be a collective garden of a group of houses. That garden should be designed in such a way that it expresses love and compassion and harmony. The garden should present nature, real nature, not artificial. No chemicals, no insecticides, should be used in that garden. You should not use the kind of weed killer that destroy the soil. You should use only organic means to build up that beautiful garden. You must respect the right of living beings to cohabit with us in the garden. We should be able to meet the snail in the garden.

If the lotus flower in the garden is covered by many small living beings and cannot flower, then you should not use violent insecticides. Maybe you should try garlic or onion. You crush pieces of garlic and onion and you mix up with some water and you spray. And these small living beings will go to another place to be and leave your lotus flower to bloom. How do you do it in the Upper Hamlet? I have seen two tiny flowers, lotus flowers covered with so many tiny living beings. I know that you don't have the idea of killing them, but we should try means like that. I learned that if you cultivate vegetables together with garlic or onion then you can keep these insects away. There are many nonviolent ways of growing a garden. You who are experts on organic gardening, you have to tell us how to build up such a garden. Such a garden is the garden of Eden. It is a real place for children and adults at the same time. If you cannot afford to have a private garden at home then you should arrange it so that a complex of houses enjoys a collective garden, where people collectively take good care of the garden and practice love and kindness, harmony and cohabitation with other living beings.

[Bell]

Young people, as soon as you have built your home in the twenty-first century please don't forget to invite me. I will be very glad to come to be in your garden, and to sit in your peace room, and breathe in and out with you, and I promise that I will bring along my teapot and prepare tea for you. When you hear the little bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha.

[Bell]

Yesterday during the question and answer time I was able to talk to you about how to take care of our sorrow, our sickness. You need to organize Dharma discussions in small groups to deepen our understanding of how to practice it. Instead of fighting our pain, our anger, our depression, we try to take good care of it — the way a mother would take care of her child.

Today, I would like to offer you another way of taking care of your pain. How to bear your pain easily. How to live with your pain. How to accept it with suffering so much. It's fine if you can transform it, but while it is still there, there are ways that you can live in peace with it. The Buddhist teaching on this is very clear, very concrete. It has to do with the teaching of love. We have to practice love directed to our own self, body and mind. We should learn how to love, and first to love our self. Love is not just the will to love. Love is the capacity of reducing the pain and offering the peace and the happiness. All these are practice. And you can practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha we speak of getting to the other shore, *paramita. Paramita* means from this shore you go to the other shore. From the shore of suffering you cross the river to go to the shore of emancipation, of non-suffering. How long does it take for you to come from this shore to the other shore? Sometimes you can do it very quickly. If you have an irritation, you are on this shore. If you know how to take good care of your irritation it will be transformed in just a few minutes, and suddenly you are on the other shore. Please do not think that Bodhisattvas or Buddhas alone can go to the other shore. You, you can do that, too. Several times a day. Every time you are subject, you are the victim of an affliction, like anger, hatred, fear, irritation, you can always practice crossing the river to go to the other shore. The Buddha said if you want to go to the other shore, don't just stay here and pray. "Please, the other shore come here so that I can step on you." The Buddha said you should not do like

that. You can go to the other shore only by crossing, either you use a ferryboat or you swim. You cannot pray for the other shore to come. And the ferryboat is the Dharma. The Buddha always said "My teaching is a raft for you to cross the river of suffering. Use it as a raft and not as something you carry on your head." So as a good practitioner you should get the raft, the ferry boat, in order to be able to cross the river of suffering by ourselves. We should learn the way, the Dharma.

The method I'm going to present to you is called the practice of the immeasurable mind. A mind that can be measured is not a very big mind. A heart that can be measured is not a large heart. That is why you have to practice the un-measurable heart, which is a very important teaching of the Buddha. There are four elements that make up true love. It is *maitri*, translated as loving kindness, *karuna*, translated as compassion, *Mudita*, translated as joy, and *upeksha*, translated as equanimity, nondiscrimination. We practice so that these elements of true love will make our heart into something un-measurable. This is something we practice in our daily life. As our heart begins to expand, to grow large, we are able to contain, to bear, any kind of suffering. It may be that we don't suffer at all, even if we embrace the suffering within us.

In the six *paramitas*, the six boats crossing the ocean of suffering, we have the boat of charity, meaning forbearance. Forbearance is the capacity to embrace difficulties, to embrace the pain, and not suffer. If your heart is large, you can embrace any amount of pain and yet you don't suffer. That is one of six boats carrying us to the other shore.

Forbearance does not mean that you try to suppress the pain. The Chinese way of writing is this: this is the heart and this is a kind of sharp knife that can cause the pain. The heart is so big that even if the knife is there it does not affect it, and finally the knife is transformed into a non-knife element. The Buddha used a very wonderful image, and he used it several times in his lifetime of teaching. He said suppose you have something dirty, if you pour it into your water container then that water you cannot drink. No one can drink such water. If you pour urine, some excrement, or something you spit out from your stomach, then you can't use the whole container of water; you have to throw it away. Even a tiny bit of dirt falling into your glass, you cannot drink it. But if you throw that container of dirt into a large river. If you throw the dirt, maybe one-kilo, or ten kilos, into an immense river, people in the whole area can still drink water from the river. That's because the river is big, and it takes no time at all for the river to transform the dirt. Overnight the dirt will not be there, because a huge amount of water is circulating. The whole amount of mud underneath will be able to transform the dirt you threw yesterday and the river becomes limpid, entirely ready for you to drink.

The difference is not whether or not you throw the dirt in. You throw the dirt, the dirt is real, existent. But if your container is small, then the whole thing has to be thrown away. But if it is a big container, it is a big river, then it can embrace the dirt very easily and it will transform the dirt very quickly, just overnight. Your heart, also, if your heart is small, then you cannot bear the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on you by society, by another person. But if your heart is large, you can very well live with it. You can embrace it, and you don’t have to suffer. So the practice of the four immeasurable minds is to blow up your heart until it becomes a big river. And the way of making your heart big is to use the instruments of *maitri, karuna, Mudita*, and *upeksha*. The essence of it is the practice of meditation, of looking deeply.

Yesterday we spoke about salvation by insight. You can only be saved; you can only be liberated by your insight. And how could insight come? You have to practice concentration. You have to practice looking deeply, and as you continue to practice looking deeply, the insight will come and liberate you from your suffering.

Mencius was a Chinese philosopher, very well known. He lost his father when he was very young, and his mother had to move into a poor quarter of the city to make a living. She stayed up very late in the night to do the work of weaving. One day the little boy came home very dirty, with his clothes all torn. He just had a fight with the children in the neighborhood. He became something like a delinquent child. She got angry, because she had great expectations of her little boy. She was doing the work of weaving. She stopped and she was about to punish him, to shout at him. Suddenly she stopped, because insight came to her. She was able to see that in the neighborhood there was no school. There was only a slaughterhouse. The children didn't go to school. They spent time playing on the road and playing games like slaughtering a pig or a calf. If the adults do things, then the children imitate. They would use a raw sweet potato to represent a cow, they used four incense sticks for legs of the cow, and they gathered and performed the killing. They imitated adults. And of course they would fight each other and say rough words to each other. That is the environment in which the mother of the boy had put him. On the verge of shouting at him, the mother realized that it's her fault. Any child put into that environment will become the same. So she did

not do anything and she was not angry anymore. That is salvation by insight.

Instead she stayed up later into the night, worked harder and saved money. She had an intention to move to another quarter of the city. Three months later she was able to move to a better neighborhood, where there was a school, where the children were clean and polite. She did not have to punish the child, to shout at him, to suffer. The boy after that became a very intelligent, hard-working student, and finally became a very famous philosopher.

You don't have to suffer if you have insight -- if you understand and that understanding is the fruit of deep looking. If we suffer so much, it is because we are ignorant. If we get angry at our father, at our mother, our son, our daughter, or our partner, it is because we are still ignorant. Practice in looking deeply will allow you to see how the other person has become like that. He was not like that when you married him, but now he is like this, like this, very hard to be with. And who is responsible? Put the questions in front of you and meditate. When I first married him, he was not like that. When I first married her, she was not like that. Why has she become so unbearable today? Who is responsible? Should I blame her, or should I blame myself, or should I blame society? All these questions help with our meditation. To meditate means to confront reality and not to escape. If you are running away from your real problems, you are not meditating correctly. You need to sit in a mound of calm, of concentration. You need to sit in a mound of mindfulness in order to confront these hardships and to look into the nature of this suffering.

[Bell]

If your father considers you to be his property, like a house or a sum of money or a car; if he considers you something like one of his belongings, he thinks he can do anything with you because you are his child, his son or his daughter. He does not know that you are a person, a human being, with the right to think and to act and to follow what you believe to be beautiful, good, and true. He only wants you to follow the path he has traced for you. You have to ask why? Why is your father like that, because around us there are fathers who are different? There are fathers who are capable of treating their sons and their daughters as free-living beings with a lot of respect. I have a practice and I treat my students with respect, even if they are very small, because I have the insight that only by treating them like that could the best thing in them come out. And that's not only for their sake, but my sake, and the sake of many people, many living beings. Because I know how to treat my students like that I have been able to bring out so many talents that are buried in each of them. If you ask why I can do like that, it’s because I have been lucky. I have had the teacher. I have had Dharma brothers, and sisters. I have learned the Dharma, so the Buddha has opened my eyes. I'm liberated from my narrowness, my prejudices.

If your father has not been able to be like that because he was just unlucky, if you blame him, if you want to punish him, he will suffer more, that's all. You cannot help him. Only when you say "Daddy, I understand you, why you are like that. I would prefer that you are not like that, but what can I do? Your education was like that. Your environment was like that. You were not in touch with the kind of teaching or insight that has a liberating nature." You don't say it, but you tell yourself about it. Suddenly, your hatred, your anger toward your father just vanishes. Your father becomes someone who needs your help, your love, rather than your punishment. Running away from your father is a way to punish him. You want him to suffer. That is why you run away from him. Even if you kill yourself, it is with the intention to make him suffer. You say, "You see, I killed myself because of you. I want you to suffer because you have treated me like an animal, like a possession of yours." So even if you kill yourself, if you run away from home, that is not inflicting the suffering on yourself, but the will to harm, the will to make suffer the person you think to be the cause of your suffering.

Between parents and children there is a fight. If you don't practice, if you are not wise, if the elements of *maitri, karuna, Mudita,* and *upeksha* are not there in our love, then we create hell for each other. Always in the fight between parents and children, it is the children who are the losers, because children are not supposed to speak back with the terms used by parents. The parents may beat their children, but the children cannot beat their parents. The parents can abuse their children with words, but children cannot do that. Because they cannot express the violence they have received, that is why they get sick. The violence they receive stays within them and seeks the way to go out, to get expressed. If the young person hangs himself, or shoots himself, that is, he wants to express his anger, his frustration, his violence, there is no other way out. So if you inflict something on yourself, it is because you have no other ways of expressing the violence in you, the hatred, and the anger in you. You are the victim of the violence you have received from your parents and from society.

Poor young child. She did not have any means to protect herself, to protect himself. The parents are not wise

enough not to pour their violence on the children, even if they intend to love them and make them happy. I know of a young man, who reacted to his father, who is a medical doctor. The medical doctor had been my student when he was studying medicine. He sounds like a young man of the new generation. He promised to himself that he would be the kind of father who would be different from his father. But when he became a father, he did exactly the same thing as the father had done to him. You hate your father. You promised that when you grow up you will not be like your father. You will do the opposite of your father. Yet, when you grow up you get married, you have children, you do exactly like him. That is the wheel of *samsara*. To practice is to cut through the wheel of samsara. You don't allow it to continue, with you and with your children.

So, in the light of this practice, both generations must make an effort. We should recognize the violence in us. The kind of violence that is destroying us, and destroying the person we love. All intentions, even all intentions to love and to make that person happy, make him, make her, suffer.

So how to help the parents handle the violence, their suffering, so that they will not pour it on their children? How to help the children, how to take care of their violence, how to transform it, not to hate their parents? Both parties have to seek the path of deep looking because both generations are just victims. The children think they are victims of their parents, and the parents think they are victims of the children. Children of other families find out they are not like my children, so we continue to blame each other. We don't accept the fact that violence is inside of both of us. Instead of fighting each other, we should come together and find a way out, between parents and children, between partner and partner. It is not because we have suffered that we have to make each other continue to suffer. We suffer very much because of the same reason. Therefore we should be allies for each other rather than enemies. The amount of suffering in us is enough to instruct us how to not make the same mistake. The Buddha said, "What has come to be, you should practice looking deeply into its nature." Once you begin to understand its nature, how it has come to be, then you are already on a path of liberation.

So partner has to come to partner and agreed on the fact that both of us have suffered. Both of us have violence, hatred, and afflictions in us. Instead of opposing each other, blaming each other, we should help each other, practicing together, and you do that in the context of a Sangha, with the help of a teacher, or many teachers, many brothers, sisters in the Dharma. Because everyone has practice, everyone can try and help bring light into your suffering and help you to practice. In the beginning, walking is difficult, but walking with a few friends in the Dharma, make it easier. In the beginning breathing is not natural, it is something like forcing you to do things that are not natural. But finally with the support of brothers and sisters in the Dharma, you find breathing is wonderful, natural, calming, refreshing, transforming.

We feel that we are victim of injustice. Most of us, not to say all of us, feel somehow we are the victims of many forms of injustice, coming from parents, from ancestors, from nature, from society. We feel that no one understands us. It's very hard for us to accept what has come to us. Suffering is there, real. The Buddha said the first truth, the first of the four noble truths, is the presence of suffering, the existence of suffering, *dukkha*.

A two-year-old child, struck with hate, a child born crippled, you cannot bear it, you blame God. If God exists, how could God allow such a thing to happen? You are very young suddenly you have cancer. You cannot believe it. Have you done anything to deserve that? If you cannot blame your parents, then you blame society, and if you don't find someone to blame, you look up and you blame God. The feeling of being a victim of injustice is always there in every one of us. We are mistreated, and the more we feel that injustice in us, the more we suffer. The only way is to meditate, to understand.

Yesterday, I talked about the young person who is so angry with his father and who made that declaration. The young man said, "I don't want to have anything to do with my father." We understand. The young man was so angry. He felt that all his suffering has come from his father. He wants to be entirely other than his father. He doesn't want to hear anything about his father, to see anything about his father. He wants to be completely cut off from that part of existence. But if he practices looking deeply, he will see that he is only his father. He is only the continuation of his father, even if he hates his father with his whole being. Hating his father is hating himself. That is something we get when we practice looking deeply. There is no alternative, except accepting your father, embrace your father. If your heart is small, you cannot embrace him, you've got to have a big heart. How to make your heart big, so that there is enough room to embrace your father?

The practice of looking deeply is the only practice that helps your heart to expand, the un-measurable mind, the un-measurable heart. When you look deeply, you begin to understand why your father is like that, why you are like

that. You see that both you and your father are victims. If you put yourself into the situation of your father, you would do exactly the same thing as he has done. Just looking around you see that. Many young men hate their fathers, promise that they will do exactly the opposite, but they have done exactly the things that their fathers have done: samsara. So with that kind of insight you can no longer be angry. Insight helps your heart to expand, and suddenly you have plenty of place and your father can be embraced in yourself. Love become possible -- hatred, anger, just transforms into love. What a miracle. It is *vipassana*, the practice of looking deeply that can perform that miracle. Salvation by insight, by understanding.

You blame your sickness; you complain that you are sick, you are ill. You think that it is very difficult to bear your illness. It makes you suffer so much. Even if it is physical pain, if you know how to practice making your heart grow big, then you have the capacity of accepting the physical pain very easily. You fancy that if you pray to God, if you pray to Avalokiteshvara, if you've got a talented doctor, then you will have perfect health. And usually we enjoy perfect health. But the idea of perfect health is just the outcome of ignorance. There is no such a thing as perfect health. If you are still alive, that is because during your childhood you were ill a lot, got sick a lot, and by getting sick like that you developed the immune system, because the fungi, bacteria, the viruses are always there, ready to attack. You can die very easily because of them. You have survived, because during your childhood you were very often sick, and during the time of sickness you had an opportunity to learn how to release the antibodies in you that were developed. So thanks to that time of illness, that happened during your childhood, you are still alive today. So if you have some kind of illness today, you have to practice looking deeply in order to accept it and live in peace with it.

There are four basic diseases with which all of us are struck, whether we want them or not. The first disease is death. I carry that disease in me, you also, death, you have to die someday. The Buddha reminds us to practice the five awareness's. I am of the nature to die. I cannot escape dying. Death is a disease that strikes everyone and you carry it with you. You may say, "I have cancer. I will die in three months. You don't have cancer. You don't have to die." That's not correct. We may die a little bit after you, but we will have to die. And it is not sure that we will die after you. You have cancer, but maybe you live longer. Impermanence, who knows. So every one of us is struck by that basic disease, death.

The second disease is old age. All of us bear the disease carry the disease inside. The Buddha said, "I am the nature to grow old, I cannot escape old age." The third disease is sickness. I am of the nature to get sick; I cannot be free from sickness. So it is better to learn to accept sickness then to fight. The more you fight, the more you suffer.

Then, I am of the nature to be born again. It is a horrible thing to be born again to many people, because throughout their life they have suffered so much that they wish they will never be reborn. Sometimes we celebrate our birthday, but there are those that are very afraid of being born again. Do you want to live forever? Can you bear the thought that you have to live forever? It's very frightening if you are not allowed to die. Sometimes we are so tired, sometimes we suffer so much, that we think that to die is the only way to liberate us. Sometimes we suffer because of illness. We cannot eat by ourselves, we cannot walk and many people have to attend to us. We are completely useless in this life and yet we are condemned to live forever. If someone comes and says, "If you want to live, to live forever, you will get it, sign here." I think you will be frightened. That is a kind of sentence, most frightening. You are struck by the disease of being born. Because being born means you have to go through again. You will have to go through again what you have been through. After you die, you will be reborn in order to do the same. Very frightening.

But these four diseases, birth, old age, sickness, and death can be overcome, just by the practice of looking deeply. The scripture called the Heart Sutra is an instrument for you to practice. If you practice, if you have the luxury of practicing the Heart Sutra, then one day you will be able to touch the world of no birth and no death. "Listen Shariputra, things are in themselves empty, nothing is created, nothing dies. There is no coming, no going, no being, no non-being." That is the finger pointing to the world, to the world of no birth and no death. If you know how to practice touching the world of no birth, no death, then you overcome the fear of these four diseases, birth, sickness, old age, death. Your heart, your understanding, becomes so immense, that looking at the so-called birth, death, disease, old age, you just smile. You are not afraid at all.

Suppose there is a wave, a wave that is living its life as a wave. There is one moment when the wave is born, there is one moment when the wave reaches its highest peak, there is one moment when the wave begins to go down, and there is one moment when the wave disappears on the surface of the ocean. The wave is so busy, paying attention to outer appearances; the wave has never been able to touch its true essence that is water. Yes, concerning

a wave there is birth, death, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful. But concerning water, there is no birth, no death, no high, no low, no being, no non-being. If the wave is able to touch its nature as water, it will overcome all fear, all suffering, caused by the idea of birth, death, high, low, ugly, beautiful.

The only way is to practice looking deeply, to have insight. Therefore the suffering, even if it is there, whether coming from society, coming from parents, coming from children, coming from friends, coming from war, from sickness, if you get the knowledge, if you get the insight, if your heart becomes immeasurable, if you can touch the true nature of no birth and no death, you can very easily embrace all these kinds of suffering. And you don't have to suffer. That is the teaching of *shanti paramita*.